

Islander

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HONOLULU Magazine's definition of **Islander of the Year:** The one person who had the most impact on Island life in the past 12 months. Our choice this year was clear-cut. **Linda Lingle**, the Mainland-born former mayor of Maui, bucked history when she became Hawai'i's **first Republican governor since 1962**, convincingly outpolling a Democratic machine that had seemed nearly invincible. ►

BY JOHN HECKATHORN • PHOTOS RAE HUO & RONEN ZILBERMAN

Lingle's journey to Washington Place was six years long—two years invested in **her close defeat by Ben Cayetano in 1998**, then four years rebuilding the fledgling Island Republican Party and creating the momentum that

took her to the governor's koa-lined office. Her impact is undeniable. Whatever your politics, you now live in a **two-party state**.



RAE HUO

h **HONOLULU:** Your biggest problem is likely to be the expectation that things in Hawai'i will change overnight. That the economy will recover, that state government will suddenly become ethical and efficient. Is it possible for you to do all that in the first year, or even four years?

Lingle: It's possible for a committed team of people to do all those things—get the economy turned around, change the perception of Hawai'i as being antibusiness, to reverse the increase in the rate of poverty that has hit Hawai'i in the past 10 years. It's possible to change the entire tone of government in four years, and I think tone has a lot to do with how people perceive government, and that influences their decisions whether to invest or not.

HONOLULU: What's a reasonable expectation for your first year?

Lingle: It's reasonable to expect that we will bring in a top-notch group of people to head up the departments, that the attitudes will become much more open and business-friendly, because one of my main focuses is job creation. I want to reverse the trend of people leaving Hawai'i. I have this slogan in my mind: "Bring 'em back." I get so many e-mails from young people living on the Mainland who say, "Now, we're excited. Now, we're considering coming home." That's been gratifying, because they didn't want to leave, they just had to.

HONOLULU: After 40 years of one-party rule, are you expecting to find closets full of skeletons when you take over?

Lingle: Whether you take over from your own party or a different party, there are things you find that you'd have done differently. But the public deserves and expects that you're going to focus on the future. So that's what I'm going to focus on.

HONOLULU: You got almost as many votes this election as you did in 1998, but the Democratic candidate got nearly 25,000 fewer votes. Did you win this election, or did the Democrats lose it?

Lingle: We won. We knew where our voters were; we identified them in advance and then we turned them out on election day. We convinced independents, or independent Democrats, or

Democrats who were just disappointed with what's happened with a one-party system, we convinced them that my ideas were such that they would feel comfortable voting for me. We had a terrific team and we won.

HONOLULU: Bill Clinton campaigned for the Democrats, a move that may have backfired. How come Rudolf Giuliani never arrived to campaign for you?

Lingle: The White House thought I was going to win. The major focus for the president was the United States Senate. In the last two weeks of the campaign, Mayor Giuliani offered his services to the White House, and they dispatched him all across the country to close Senate races. It was a good strategy. I just saw Giuliani over the weekend; he addressed the Republican governors and imagine—a group of governors giving a former mayor a standing ovation. I think he'll be out here in February. It will give the people here a chance to know him; he's a terrific guy.

HONOLULU: You didn't have long coattails. The Republicans lost four crucial state House seats. Does that really mean the voters gave you a mandate for change?

Lingle: If you take a broad view, we won both of the mayors' races that were up for grabs, and the one on Maui was a huge upset. Those races have to be put into the mix before you decide whether there were any coattails. On the House races, there was some redistricting, so it isn't an apples-to-apples comparison. That's one issue. The second issue was that the Democratic Party did the most false and misleading campaign of direct negative mail that I've ever seen. They had these people on the ground from Washington, D.C., who ran a kind of cookie-cutter campaign of attack. But again, I think that the mayor's race on both of the other islands show that we still did pretty well, and we picked up two Senate seats.

HONOLULU: The Democratic Party may decide to do everything it can to keep your administration from being a



RONEN ZILBERMAN

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success. It controls the Legislature, it's clearly going to spend the next four years trying to get the governorship back. How are you going to deal with that?

Lingle: I expect a lot of cooperation from the Legislature. As it gets closer to another election in two years, they don't want a sitting governor campaigning against them in their district. I won't have to run again in two years; they will. They're also very aware people voted for change, both in the Democratic primary and in the general election. I've already gotten a nice letter from [House Speaker] Calvin Say and [Vice Speaker] Sylvia Luke requesting a meeting with [Lt. Gov.] Duke [Aiona] and me to discuss our mutual interests. In the first year in particular, I expect a good level of cooperation.

HONOLULU: Who are the key centrist Democrats with whom you think you can work?

Lingle: Many, there are many. I've been in politics for 20 years, so I know most of them pretty well. The Maui people, obviously, are going to have mutual interests. Bob Nakasone, who is a long-serving House member, a Democrat—I was on the council with him in the 1980s, we were very close.

[Senate Majority Leader] Colleen Hanabusa and I got to know each other doing the recounts of '98, and we've stayed close through the years. There are many people I've served with in some capacity, or I've lobbied as mayor, so I have pretty high hopes.

HONOLULU: Although no one is saying so, is it good to have a Republican governor and a Democratic legislature? Will things formerly handled in backroom deals become public?

Lingle: Having a balanced government, you can hear both sides very clearly. In talking with the governors in the other states, sometimes having a legislature of your own party doesn't necessarily work out the way you hope.

HONOLULU: Isn't it going to be handy to have the Democrats to blame if things don't improve?

Lingle: That's going to be a consideration for them, if they took a position of being obstructionist. I could say, “Look, I proposed these things; they just didn't want to go along with them. I knew what the solutions were, but they weren't solution-oriented.” People who have been elected for a long time understand that very well. I'm really looking forward to it. You can see with Cayetano: When you share the same party, there are sometimes extra burdens on you.

HONOLULU: Cayetano's relationship with the Legislature was not always warm.

Lingle: He couldn't even get his appointments in, and both houses were predominantly Democrat.

HONOLULU: What problems aren't

going to go away, just with a change in administration?

Lingle: The budget problems.

h **HONOLULU:** Ben Cayetano has argued that the state will need to tap \$200 million from the Hurricane Relief Fund to get through the next fiscal year. Isn't it going to be tough to have a new beginning when you don't have much money?

Lingle: They've had these kinds of one-year fixes for what is really a structural problem. This year it's the Hurricane Relief Fund. Last year they didn't fund the deputies in the departments, didn't fund the governor's office. It's been year-to-year, trying to get through, rather than recognizing that the economy shrank and the government didn't shrink. It is going to be a challenge, but I want the public to know the challenge will be met. I expect a hiring freeze, except for teachers and prison guards and emergency responders. We're going to have to get a real good handle on where we are. There are going to be some tough decisions to make. But they should be decisions that don't just get us through the year; they should be decisions that allow the economy to expand so that revenues will increase.

h **HONOLULU:** How are you going to fix the economy, especially since neither Japan nor the mainland United States seems economically healthy?

Lingle: Every state has factors it can't control. It's important to deal with the ones we can. Our No. 1 problem has always been our reputation as antibusiness. People don't want to invest in a place with laws that aren't friendly to business. Second, they don't want to invest in a place where they feel like they have to know the right people to get something done. That will change dramatically. Word has to go out that you'll be treated fairly if you come to do business in Hawai'i. You don't need the "right" lawyer or the "right" architect or the "right" anything. Just come in, and if your project creates jobs and benefits the community, then it will go forward.

HONOLULU: Political leaders have

been saying for decades upon decades that they were going to diversify the economy. It has never happened. Why?

Lingle: I don't think we've brought any people to government who understood what it took to create that kind of diversity. I'll give you an example. Agriculture has become a new fascination for me, because there are some exciting things happening in Hawai'i. And it's not the vision we had of agriculture 10 years ago, not plantation, single-crop agriculture; it's entrepreneurs, small-business people doing very exciting things. People's perception is that agriculture is in decline; the fact is revenues from agriculture have gone up every year for the last 20 years. But the person they put in as the head of the Department of Agriculture has been much more regulatory in focus—an enforcer, rather than an advocate for agriculture.

HONOLULU: How is creating seven local school boards alone going to solve Hawai'i's deep problems with public education?

Lingle: It does two things right away. First, it involves parents in a way that they're just not involved in the school district now. If Windward O'ahu was in charge of the Windward schools, people would come out, would elect their own school board; they would determine how the standards were met in their district. Because a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work in a place as diverse as Hawai'i. The second thing it does right away is get money down to the local level, rather than a statewide bureaucracy. In my vision of how this would work, we would continue to collect money statewide, determine how much we're going to spend per student in Hawai'i, multiply it by how many students are on the Big Island, how many students are in Maui County, and then give the money to the district. Set standards statewide, hold them accountable, but how they go about doing it is now up to them.

HONOLULU: Don't you need a constitutional amendment to break up the school board?

Lingle: Yes.

HONOLULU: So that's not going to happen overnight?

Lingle: No, but getting it on the ballot in the next election would be important. I've already met with [state Schools Superintendent Pat] Hamamoto, from the Department of Education, which is currently undertaking its own decentralization plan. I think it's because they realize that the current system is just not working, and if we can all agree to that, then we can start to get to the solutions.

HONOLULU: You talked about vouchers for special-education students. Is it time to privatize at least some educational programs in Hawai'i?

Lingle: With special ed, if the DOE has not been able to help these families and students for such a long time, then vouchers would be something to look at right away. They're spending, what, \$25,000 a year, \$30,000 a year per student? We need to ask ...

HONOLULU: It would be cheaper ...

Lingle: Cheaper and better. People say, "There aren't enough schools ... " Well, start with a pilot program, number one. Number two, if schools knew there were these 10,000 kids out with these vouchers, they would spring up. Maybe Punahou would start a program for special-ed students at its campus, sort of broaden its community involvement—maybe 'Iolani, maybe MidPac. They've been very successful with creative education, maybe if they applied their principles to special education ...

I also think that the charter-school movement has got to be supported in a more positive way. The state is dooming these schools to failure, making it difficult for them instead of seeing them as exciting partners. I think it's all about choice. Parents need more choices; teachers need more choices. Students are not all the same. Fifty percent of the charter schools in Hawai'i are Native Hawaiian-based. That's a strong statement that here is a community that does not feel it's being served, it wants a different environment for its students. With Kamehameha Schools coming in now as a partner, I think it opens up a lot of exciting opportunities.

HONOLULU: You've said Hawai'i state government needs to work more efficiently. But you also talked about how much you value the public-worker unions and won't lay off state workers. Aren't you trying to have it both ways?

Lingle: Not at all. I'm dependant on public workers to carry out my vision. I've had good experience in motivating public workers; I value them and they know it. I never laid off a public worker in the eight years I was mayor, but we sure operated at a much higher level than when I got there. I expect the same thing will be true here, and the workers want it. They want to be respected. Nobody wants to be the butt of jokes. Everybody has pride; they care about what their family thinks of them. As Hawai'i starts moving up in education and moving down in poverty and so on, people will feel good about it. I don't think it's trying to have it both ways at all.

HONOLULU: Gary Rodrigues, when he was still head of the United Public Workers, was frequently referred to as the 26th state senator. What do you think will be the political impact of his being found guilty on 100 federal charges?

Lingle: Not only was he a lobbyist, he was on the judicial selection committee. So there's a person who was stealing from his members who was making recommendations on who should serve on the judiciary. I think it's an example of arrogance run amok. Not unlike the public officials who have gone to jail, people came to believe they could do anything, because no matter what they did, they were kept in their position of power and responsibility. And they were right: They could do anything; they got away with it for a very long time. I think the public made a decision this time not to be taken advantage of.

HONOLULU: You've proposed a cabinet-level position for tourism. Won't that just add another layer of bureaucracy to tourism promotion?

Lingle: Well, it could be, if your vision wasn't crystal clear as mine is on this. This person has nothing to do with promoting tourism. When someone in the visitor industry sees the state doing something that hurts the industry, or the HTA is doing something, or the convention center, and they want to be able to talk to the governor about it, I'm not always available. I want them to have a person—not a gatekeeper, the opposite,

a person to hold the gate open, to say, "C'mon, tell me about these issues." I mean, we have an entire department for agriculture, but we really don't have that person who has the governor's ear for tourism.

HONOLULU: You've questioned whether the Hawai'i Tourism Authority is doing a good job with the \$60 million it gets in public money. Does Hawai'i spend too much or too little on visitor marketing?

Lingle: We don't spend too much. We've got to be competitive. I don't think the HTA has lived up to its potential yet, let me put it that way. I've worked with the new director [Rex Johnson] when he headed the DOT; he was one of the few guys in government who you could go to and always get something done. I have a lot of confidence in him. He works really well with the Legislature; I think that will take some of the edge off of that relationship. The Legislature needs to stay out of HTA. They have ultimate responsibility over them, but they need to resist the urge to get into HTA day-to-day. I don't think it will ever reach its potential if politicians get their hands on it. That would be a big mistake.

HONOLULU: Republicans are usually proponents of less government. Why should public money go to support the private interests in the visitor industry at all?

Lingle: The money from the hotel room tax is what is supporting the HTA, so it's not money we're taking from anywhere else. Visitor industry promotion is job insurance. I never thought of it as helping a hotel, I thought of it as helping a family. I'm making sure their father, brother, sister, auntie has a job, and it's a decent job, and it's year-round, and they don't have to be worried about being laid off because occupancy is down.

HONOLULU: You've promised to support UH and put behind you the fact that UH president Evan Dobelle publicly supported your opponent. But the first rule of politics is to reward your friends and punish your enemies. Can you really say that Dobelle's endorsement of Hirono will have no effect on your relationship with him?

Lingle: It will probably make me try

harder to get along with him than I would have otherwise. Because my obligation is to make sure I'm doing everything I can for the public, to make life better here, and that means these kinds of personal things have to be put on the side. We need the university as an economic driver, to diversify our economy so people have jobs, so families can stay in Hawai'i. It's an educational opportunity for kids who can't or don't want to leave Hawai'i. We need the university to be successful to achieve all of those things.

HONOLULU: When Dobelle called to tell you about the commercial he made for Hirono, you hung up on him after telling him his decision to support Hirono was simple.

Lingle: No. He said first, "Linda, this is a very complicated issue," and I said, "Evan, it's very simple," and I just hung up.

HONOLULU: Who do you think "simply" applied this political pressure?

Lingle: I don't know what it was; I don't care what it was. It's real simple: He shouldn't have done it. I think most people in my situation would have reacted similarly or more harshly than I did. Someone calling you up 30 minutes before—I think the commercial had already run—and calling me up and saying, "Oh, by the way, I'm doing this ..." I don't think anybody who'd fought for six years would have done any differently. Again, it's America; anybody can support anybody they want to, but not the president of a publicly funded university. I just thought it was inappropriate. And again, if you're going to do it, why call? Just do it.

HONOLULU: You've promised to work with the Bush administration to bring recognition to Native Hawaiians. But Republicans in general have been negative on the issue. How's Bush going to help?

Lingle: At a national level, there are Republicans who I don't think truly understand the issue yet, but in the national platform of the Republican party, there is recognition of Native Hawaiians. Talking to the administration is important, because the departments will take their lead from that. One of the

major stumbling blocks right now is that, without understanding how much is already coming into the state, they're worried about a large impact on the budget, because of their experience with Native Americans. A lot of our focus is going to have to be talking with the people in budget. Because the president is facing the possibility of a war, as well as the Homeland Security funding that's going to be required, and is taking a very hard line on any additional spending. Native Hawaiian issues have been important to me since I first moved to Moloka'i as a young person; it had a great influence on me being there and watching the homestead problems. When I was mayor, we eliminated property tax on Hawaiian homestead land. We were the first county to ever do that. It was something very new at the time, but it was the right thing to do, and I got the general community's support to do it. I had a Department of Hawaiian Homelands task force within county government, because every Hawaiian family that gets a house, that gets on the land, is helping all of us. It's one more family now with a stake in our state, who has its own property, doesn't need housing assistance, doesn't need welfare; it's just a good thing.

HONOLULU: You've talked about resolving the Hawaiian Homelands issue, which would be great at long last. But what about the bigger and more expensive issue of the ceded lands? Where do you stand on that?

Lingle: The fact that something is expensive doesn't mean it's not the right thing to do. You owe a mortgage on your house. It looms large, and you look at it and you go, "Wow, I owe a lot of money." Well, yeah, but you have to pay it. You made a promise. America and Hawai'i have commitments too, and the fact that it's expensive doesn't mean you don't do it. It means that you structure it in a way you can afford, structure it in a way that the general public thinks is fair and right, but you resolve it. You don't let it linger.

This issue of not paying

the Hawaiians undisputed amounts that have been owed since July of 2001 is just aggravating the problem. It makes it so much more difficult when you sit down to negotiate, because to have a successful negotiation, both sides have to give, and both sides have to feel that they were treated fairly. Right now, Hawaiians don't feel they're being treated fairly, because they're not. These are undisputed amounts going back to July of 2001 that haven't been paid. That's going to be one of the first things I'm going to do. We can certainly take it to the Legislature, at a minimum, immediately, and say, "Look, this is a bill that is past due. Let's pay it." For me, the ceded lands issue just has to be resolved. Is it easy? No, but we have to do it, and we have to get started right away.

HONOLULU: What do you think will be the ultimate resolution?

Lingle: Well, the Hawaiians already have a land base: the Department of Hawaiian Homelands. There's a couple hundred thousand acres of land; you can't get a better land base than that right now. As far as the settlement, it may well be a combination of land and revenue and future revenue. People talk about tuition waivers at the university, other kinds of things, but you have to go in with the attitude that this has to be resolved in a fair way. It has to be something the state can afford over the long-term, something the general public recognizes as fair and the Hawaiians will accept.

HONOLULU: Ceded lands, along with improving education and diversifying the economy, seems to be one of those issues that has been around forever.

Lingle: I think ceded lands is easier than education or the economy, because I'm the chief negotiator for the state. I'm the one who will eventually go to the Legislature and the people of Hawai'i and say, "This is what I believed was fair, and why." So in that sense, the ceded lands, if you have the desire to do it, and the will to do it, which I do, it's the one of those three issues that you can directly impact. At least rally the public behind this idea that if you don't resolve it, nothing will be, as a Hawaiian would tell you, pono in Hawai'i.

HONOLULU: The Democrats have a fairly deep bench of people with government experience, in a way that the Republicans do not. Are you going to end up hiring people who are Democrats to work on your team?

Lingle: I'm always amused at that question, because it presupposes that the people who have been there have been doing a good job, and that's not necessarily the case. But one of the questions we do not allow the search committee to ask is, "What is your political party?" or "Who did you support in the election?" Those are not qualifications to serve in the cabinet. On the other hand, I've told everyone who currently works in the government that if they share our philosophy of public service, to send in their resume and they'll be treated fairly. I got one really great resume—I can't talk about it yet—from someone currently in one of the departments who is very exciting to me, that this person would want to now come and work with me. So I expect you'll see a mixture, but I would say almost all, but not all, of the directors will be new. Sometimes you just need a fresh look at things.

HONOLULU: You seem to have moved the party in a centrist direction, even to the point where people have asked, "Are you sure she's a Republican?" Are you a Republican?

Lingle: Absolutely. I'm a bleeding-heart conservative. I care very deeply about people, and about people who can't take care of themselves, about the mentally ill, about children, about people who

RONEN ZILBERMAN



CONTINUED ON PAGE 74

islander of the year

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

become addicted to drugs. These things touch me, but I know that having compassion without having the resources to act doesn't amount to much. Your ability to help people is only because the economy is strong and you have the resources and can allocate to help other people. The rhetoric of compassion is not enough.

I hope people will say, "Wow, there's this organization called the Republican Party and it's different than it was just a few years ago." Because that's the same thing I'm going to have to do now with the government, to get people to say in three or four years, "Wow, it changed; you moved it." The foundation in changing the party was to convince people to focus on the things we agree on rather than the things we disagree on. The same thing with the government. Yes, there are a hundred issues, but let's all agree, these are the three we're going to focus on: restoring trust, improving the schools, expanding the economy. Why do I keep coming back to the economy? Because without it, we can't fund any of the other things we want to do. I like community-based school boards. That's a very Republican point of view, to believe in the communities rather than in the power of a centralized government. Yes, I like lower taxes and less regulation of people's lives. I like individual responsibility. Yes, I would say in all those ways, I am a Republican. Socially? I'm a very moderate person.

HONOLULU: How's the swimming going?

Lingle: Great. I have a great swim partner; I still swim at the Nu'uanu Y. In fact, we swam yesterday, and I expect to keep up my four-day-a-week schedule.

HONOLULU: The Sunday after the election, there's suddenly a news story about your boyfriend. Are you ready, especially as a single woman, to have your whole life become public property?

Lingle: It is part of the job. If you don't like it, you should go find another line of work, because the public has a right and a desire to know these things about you. I don't think it's a negative;

they expect to understand you as a person. I feel bad for my friends sometimes, because your friends and your family, they didn't choose politics, you did. The newspaper did a nice job, very fair, but Mike and I are just friends. It's not a romantic relationship. But I have several good, close friends, and I expect more and more they'll get more exposure than they like. My swim partner, Brian, gets more attention than he likes now. He's a businessperson and married. We're just swim partners.

HONOLULU: Twenty years from now, do you think your tenure as governor will simply be viewed as a speed bump between long stretches of Democratic control or do you think it will be viewed as the beginning of a Republican streak?

Lingle: I think that it's going to be the time of the real move to a two-party system. So many people worked on this. We started it with the election in 2000; we picked up the House seats. This time, yeah, we lost a few in the House and I think we're at 15, but that's still 20 percent more than we were at in '98, and we picked up two more senators. We only had three, and now we have five. We knew that the governorship was the major race we wanted to win. Because with the governorship is the ability to appoint people, not just the directors and deputies and secretaries, but to all the boards and commissions now. It's giving new people an opportunity to get involved in politics. I think this will be seen as a major pivotal point in creating a two-party system, which is the beginning of creating real accountability in government. I think 20 years from now it will be seen as an important point in Hawai'i's history.

HONOLULU: Are you going to be a one-term or two-term governor?

Lingle: We all hope, of course, for two terms; we feel the vision we have—we want to carry it forward. But we'll take them one at a time, and what it really comes down to in the end is: Did you deliver on your promises? When re-election comes up, it's going to be, 'Did you deliver or not?' So we never worried about re-election when I was mayor. I said, "Look, just do your job. Deliver on the things we said, and if we do, the people will put us back in." **PAU**